

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 33687 242151Z

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

USNMR/SHAPE

CINCUSAFE

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 33687

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, MMOL, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH DECIDE ON NEW AIR SUPERIORITY FIGHTER

1. SUMMARY: FRENCH HAVE DECIDED TO DROP ACF PROJECT
AND TO DEVELOP MIRAGE 2000 AS THEIR FUTURE AIR
SUPERIORITY FIGHTER. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DISCUSSION WITH US DECEMBER 19, JACQUES MARTIN
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PAGE 02 PARIS 33687 242151Z

(DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATIONAL DEFENSE) CON-
FIRMED THAT GOF DEFENSE COUNCIL (FRENCH NSC) APPROVED

ON DECEMBER 18 DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SINGLE-ENGINE AIR SUPERIORITY AIRCRAFT--DESIGNATED MIRAGE 2000. THIS WILL REPLACE THE ACF (COMBAT AIRCRAFT OF THE FUTURE) PROJECT WHICH HAS LONG BEEN RUMORED FOR EXTINCTION. MIRAGE 2000 WILL USE AIR FRAME DEVELOPED FROM MIRAGE III, BUT INCORPORATING "THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY" (MARTIN'S WORDS) INCLUDING COMPOSITE MATERIALS AND "FLY BY WIRE" CONTROLS. IT WILL BE POWERED BY THE M-53 ENGINE, ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR THE ACF, AND SHOULD COST ABOUT ONE-HALF THE ESTIMATED COST OF ACF.

3. IN EXPLAINING FRENCH DECISION, MARTIN SAID THREE FACTORS DOMINATED THEIR THINKING. FIRST, GOF IS DETERMINED TO KEEP FRENCH MILITARY AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY GOING ON REALISTICALLY COMPETITIVE BASIS WITH OTHER NATION'S INDUSTRIES. SECOND, HIGH ESTIMATE COST OF ACF WAS PRICING IT OUT OF "REALISTIC COMPETITION" WITH OTHER NATIONS' AIRCRAFT, AS WELL AS PLACING MAJOR STRAIN ON DEFENSE BUDGET, ACF TRIED TO COMBINE AIR SUPERIORITY/PENETRATION ROLES IN ONE AIRCRAFT, WHICH EXCALATED COST TREMENDOUSLY. THIRD, WHILE FRENCH AIR FORCE HAD WANTED TO RETAIN STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DELIVERY ROLE AFTER MIRAGE IV GOES OUT OF SERVICE IN 1980'S, AND LOOKED TO ACF TO DO THIS, GOF HAS DECIDED THAT STRATEGIC NUCLEAR ROLE SHOULD BE LEFT TO SSBN AND IRBM FORCES. THUS, DECISION TO SCRAP ACF MEANS THAT FRENCH AIR FORCE EVENTUALLY WILL BE GOING OUT OF STRATEGIC DELIVERY BUSINESS, ALTHOUGH IT WILL KEEP TAC NUKE DELIVERY CAPABILITY.

4. MARTIN ADDED THAT FRENCH HOPE MIRAGE 2000 CAN BECOME STURDY BASIC DESIGN THAT WILL EVOLVE OVER COMING DECADES TO MEET DIFFERING NEEDS OF MANY COUNTRIES, AS WAS CASE WITH MIRAGE III AND US-BUILT F-4.

5. COMMENT: DECISION TO ABANDON ACF WAS WISE ONE FROM
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PAGE 03 PARIS 33687 242151Z

ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW. THERE WAS LITTLE PROSPECT THAT OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD BUY THIS PLANE, PRICED AT ABOUT \$20 MILLION EACH. LIMITED QUANTITIES REQUIRED BY FRENCH AIR FORCE WOULD NOT HAVE JUSTIFIED ENORMOUS DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION EXPENSES. AS REPLACEMENT FOR ACF, HOWEVER, FRENCH HAVE REACHED INTO THEIR HAT TO PULL OUT NEW PROJECT THAT WILL REQUIRE TIME AND MONEY TO DEVELOP. EVEN IF FRENCH CAN HAVE MIRAGE 2000 IN PRODUCTION BY EARLY 1980S, IT PROBABLY WILL BE TECHNOLOGICALLY INFERIOR TO F-16,

AND SEVERAL YEARS LATER ENTERING INTO SERVICE THAN
F-16. CONSEQUENTLY, FRENCH MAY ONCE AGAIN BE
EMBANKING ON PROGRAM TO DEVELOP AIRCRAFT THAT WILL
BE "TOO LITTLE AND
TOO LATE" BY OBJECTIVE MEASUREMENTS
SO FAR AS SALE TO OTHER COUNTRIES IS CONCERNED.
NEVERTHELESS, FRENCH MAY HOPE THAT MIRAGE 2000 WILL
STAND CHANCE OF BEING SELECTED BY UK AND FRG AS
SUCCESSOR TO F-4 IF BRITISH AND GERMANS TURN AWAY
FROM MRCA AS THEIR FUTURE AIR SUPERIORITY AIRCRAFT.
FRENCH DECISION TO OPT FOR MIRAGE 2000 ALSO PROBABLY
REFLECTS EFFORT TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE IN RACE FOR
SALES OF AIR SUPERIORITY PLANE TO THIRD WORLD.
CLEARLY, THE ACF--BECAUSE OF ITS HIGH PRICE TAG
AND LIMITED TECHNOLOGY--WOULD HAVE BEEN A LOSER IN
THAT MARKET.
GAMMON

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